



1 SITE CONTEXT & HISTORY

SITE DESCRIPTION

Chimney Rock State Park is part of the larger Southern Appalachian Mountain range that extends from northern Alabama to northern Virginia. It is located on the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains in southwestern North Carolina, situated within a band of mountains and foothills, known geologically as the Inner Piedmont Belt. The park is 25 miles southeast of Asheville, North Carolina.

Chimney Rock State Park is comprised of notable landscapes and significant ecological physiographic regions. Portions of the state park are located in Buncombe, Rutherford, Polk and Henderson counties, and include the following: Chimney Rock Mountain, Hickory Nut Falls, World's Edge, and portions of Rumbling Bald, Stony Mountain, and Cane Creek Mountain. A 4,531-acre expanse, Chimney Rock State Park straddles two physiographic regions (Blue Ridge Mountains and Piedmont), as can be seen in Figure 1.1. The regional context and park study area can be seen in Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

Most of the state park is also located within Hickory Nut Gorge, a geographic region which extends northwest to southeast from the Continental Divide south to Lake Lure. The gorge is carved by the Rocky Broad River, which flows between the exposed granite domes and cliffs of Round Top Mountain and Chimney Rock Mountain, along U.S. Route 64/74A. The park contains one of the largest concentrations of rare species within the Blue Ridge Mountains and is known to support over 90 rare plant species, of which three dozen have state or federal designations. The Hickory Nut Gorge Macrosite comprises the entire length of the gorge and covers nearly 30,000 acres in Buncombe, Henderson, Polk, and Rutherford counties. It is significant for containing rare plant, animal, and natural communities. With its large size and low degree of fragmentation, the macrosite has a good prospect for long-term viability. This viability is increased by excellent landscape connections southward along the Blue Ridge Escarpment towards South Carolina, as well as northward and eastward toward the South Mountains. Such large, unfragmented landscapes provide benefits to both common and rare species at the local level as well as at larger scales. The park will play a prominent role in landscape-scale protection, as less than one-third of the macrosite has any level of formal protection.

Lake Lure, the area's most notable water feature, is found on the eastern edge of the park. The lake, owned by the Town of Lake Lure, encompasses 720 acres, with 27 miles of shoreline. None of the park property adjoins Lake Lure, but the park provides excellent views of the lake.

HISTORY OF CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK

Originally named Hickory Nut Gorge State Park, Chimney Rock State Park is one of eight state parks established as part of the 2002 New Parks for a New Century initiative undertaken by the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. This initiative was launched in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources' "One North Carolina Naturally" program that sought protection and stewardship of the state's most important natural resource areas. In 2005, with tremendous public support, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized the creation of Hickory Nut Gorge State Park. Early acquisitions for the new state park included a 1,568-acre tract known as World's Edge, land on Rumbling Bald Mountain, and land near the Bat Cave community.



FIGURE 1.1: CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK STATEWIDE CONTEXT



FIGURE 1.2: STUDY AREA REGIONAL CONTEXT

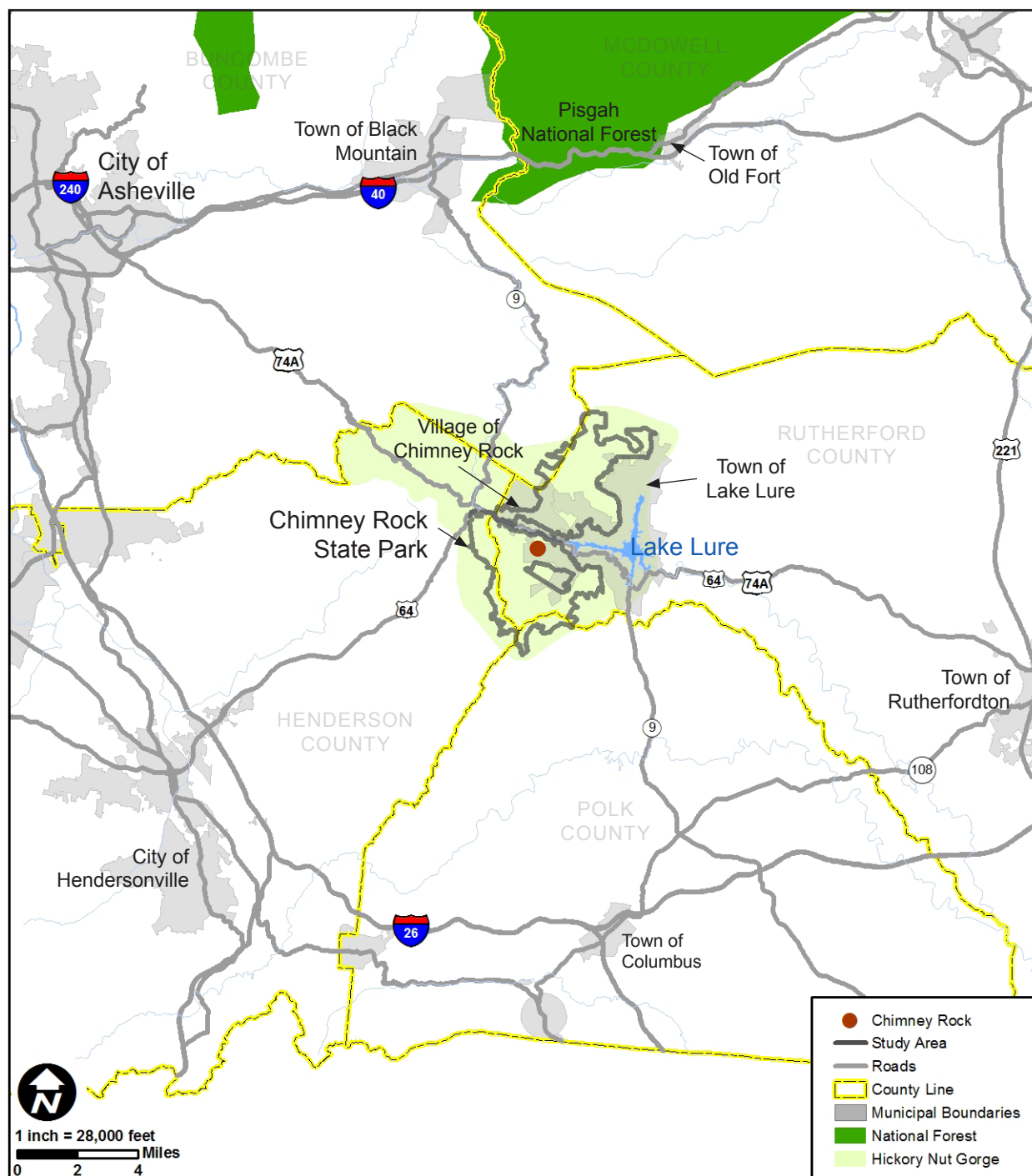
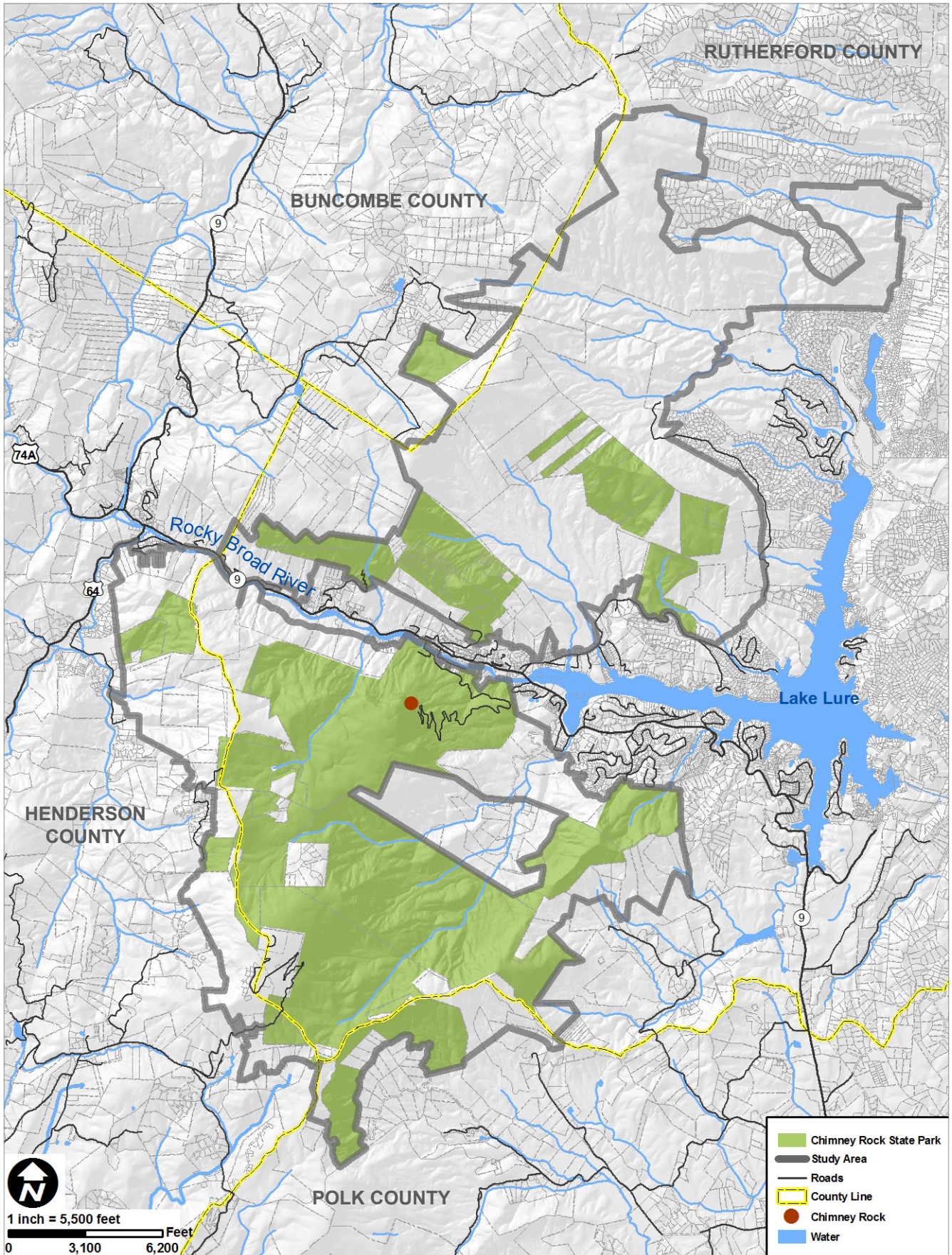




FIGURE 1.3: STUDY AREA PARK LANDS*



*As of February 2011



In 2006, the Morse family, owners of the private Chimney Rock Park, offered their 996-acre park for sale. Shortly thereafter, the State of North Carolina began negotiations to purchase the private park and, in May 2007, completed the purchase as an addition to the growing Hickory Nut Gorge State Park. During that same year, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized \$15 million to support acquisition of additional property at Hickory Nut Gorge State Park. Being traditional for North Carolina state parks to be named after a dominant natural feature, the park name was changed from Hickory Nut Gorge State Park to Chimney Rock State Park through legislative authorization later in 2007.

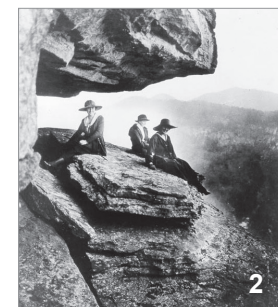
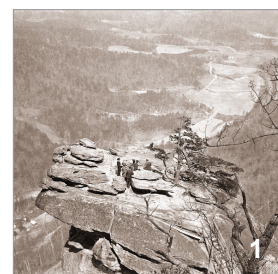
HISTORY OF THE FORMER CHIMNEY ROCK PARK

Jerome B. “Rome” Freeman was the first owner of Chimney Rock, purchasing 67 acres that included the iconic Chimney Rock, Hickory Nut Falls and the cliffs of Chimney Rock Mountain in 1870. Freeman was the first to have conceived the idea of a public park to celebrate the unique geology and spectacular views afforded from Chimney Rock Mountain. By 1887, Freeman constructed a set of stairs and walkways that linked visitors to the top of Chimney Rock. Freeman also built the first walkway from Chimney Rock to Hickory Nut Falls.

Dr. Lucius B. Morse and his brothers purchased Chimney Rock from Freeman in 1902 hoping to capitalize on speculation that a new railroad would be built through Hickory Nut Gorge, increasing tourism to the region.

The railroad through the gorge was never realized, and until completion of the Hickory Nut Gap Road in 1915, travel to the park was extremely difficult. Visitors arrived at the remote park landscape by carriage and on horseback. Governor Locke Craig’s “Good Roads Movement” in 1915 dramatically improved access to the Hickory Nut Gorge region and provided the impetus for increased tourism. Morse completed the entrance road in 1916, linking it directly to the completed Hickory Nut Gap Road and opening the park to automobile travel. On July 4, 1916, Morse, erected a United States flag on top of Chimney Rock to inaugurate the park.

During the 1920s and 1930s much of the park’s original infrastructure was installed. Lake Lure was built in 1927 by Dr. Morse as a speculative resort and land development enterprise. Morse founded Chimney Rock Mountains, Inc. and a subsidiary, Carolina Mountain Power Company, constructed the lake dam. In 1946, Morse constructed a tunnel and elevator to deliver patrons to the top of Chimney Rock, thereby avoiding the arduous climb of 470 steps. During their 105 years of ownership, the Morse family expanded the park, creating an appealing and unique destination.

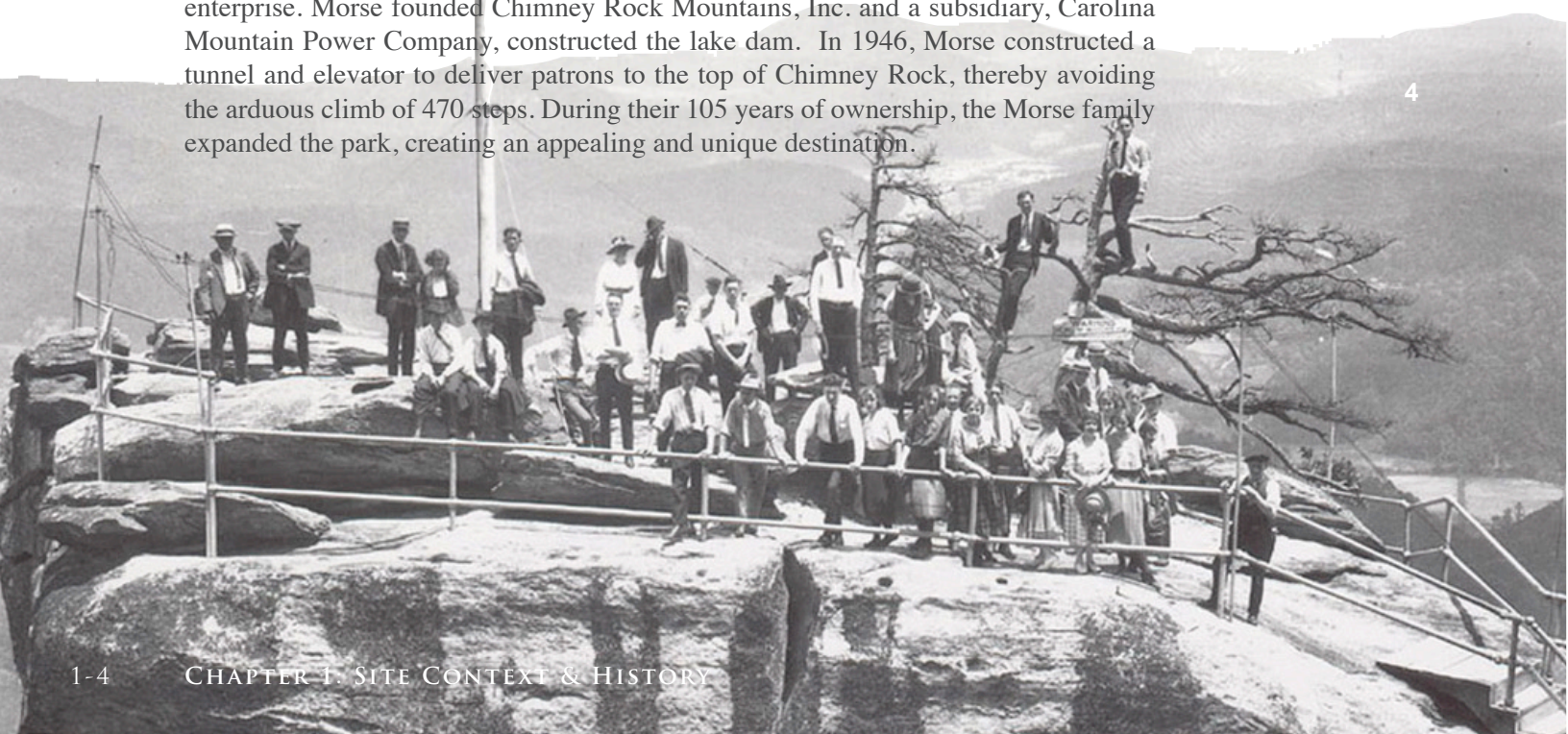


1 Top of Chimney Rock, ca. 1910

2 Opera Box, ca. 1920

3 Park entrance bridge, ca. 1925

4 Top of Chimney Rock, ca. 1918





RECREATION RESOURCES AND VISITATION

THE HICKORY NUT GORGE REGION

The tourism industry in the Hickory Nut Gorge region is undergoing a significant transformation. Once based principally on private attractions owned and operated by entrepreneurs and their families, the gorge is shifting away from institutional and corporate ownership and management. With the State of North Carolina's acquisition of land within the Hickory Nut Gorge, the region will continue to evolve as a tourist destination. The developing Chimney Rock State Park will serve as one of the biggest draws of visitation and tourism for the region in the coming years.

The Hickory Nut Gorge region offers both public and private natural-based recreational resource opportunities for visitors. Opportunities include picnicking, bird watching, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, and water based recreation. Buncombe, Rutherford, Polk, and Henderson counties offer small community and municipal parks, as well as hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian opportunities on state and federal lands such as DuPont State Forest, Pisgah National Forest, and several other western North Carolina state parks. Various outfitters and guides offer tours and recreational opportunities within the gorge.

CHIMNEY ROCK VILLAGE & TOWN OF LAKE LURE

Chimney Rock Village is situated along the historic Hickory Nut Gap Road (U.S. Route 64/74A) and is the location of the existing Chimney Rock State Park entrance. Village merchants have created the Community Development Association (CDA) to promote economic revitalization of the Chimney Rock Village area. The CDA is also broadening the tourist economy through the renovations of public and private places. A special focus has been placed on public access to the village's three-mile portion of the Rocky Broad River, which accommodates public access to the water providing an overall pleasant environment for guests, visitors, and residents.

The Town of Lake Lure is located one mile east of the current entrance to the park. The Town offers lodging, retail, commercial, and restaurant services for residents and visitors. The Town operates a park system consisting of a waterfront greenway, Morse Park, a marina, and a public golf course. The Beach at Lake Lure accommodates swimming and sunbathing.



View west into Hickory Nut Gorge from Lake Lure



FORMER CHIMNEY ROCK PARK

The former Chimney Rock Park has always been the primary attraction for visitors to the Hickory Nut Gorge region. Shortly after it officially opened for business in 1916, more than 14,000 visitors toured the park in 1917 and by 1919, visitation exceeded 35,000. As indicated by Table 1, visitation at Chimney Rock Park has been steady over the years. A record 278,000 visitors came to the park in 1999. Since that time, attendance has declined, in concert with a national decline in tourism coinciding with the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the 2008-2010 recessionary economy. Nevertheless, the current Chimney Rock State Park remains a popular local, regional and southeastern United States destination. In 2009, the park recorded 210,720 visitors, and in 2010, the number reached 214,728.

At an elevation of 2,280-feet, the geologic feature, Chimney Rock, affords a 75-mile view of the surrounding mountains and Lake Lure. Most of the park's natural features are connected by a network of trails. These trails include the Great Woodland Adventure Trail, the Four Seasons Trail, the Hickory Nut Falls Trail, the Outcroppings Trail, and the Skyline Trail. The Skyline Trail takes visitors from the Chimney Rock to Exclamation Point, the highest publicly accessible point in the park, at an elevation of 2,480 feet.

Other visitor opportunities within the park include picnicking, environmental education, and concessions such as food and retail.

FIGURE 1.4: CHIMNEY ROCK ATTENDANCE CHART 1990-2010

Year	Attendance
1990	134,133
1991	160,727
1992	168,522
1993	210,814
1994	216,330
1995	230,911
1996	232,923
1997	248,049
1998	n/a
1999	278,802
2000	277,961
2001	269,191
2002	275,516
2003	259,966
2004	244,291
2005	215,470
2006	215,764
2007	241,585
2008	212,115
2009	210,720
2010	214,728



INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The 1987 State Parks Act establishes that park lands are to be used by the people of the state and their visitors in order to promote understanding of and pride in the natural heritage of this state. Park interpretation and environmental education are primary ways in which the Division of Parks and Recreation achieves this purpose.

Interpretive themes are summary statements about the ideas, concepts, and stories that are central to the nature and significance of the park. Primary themes provide the foundation from which programs and media are developed. Most major interpretive efforts should relate to one or more of the primary themes. Effective interpretation results when visitors are able to connect these concepts with the park's resources, creating personal meaning from the experience. Interpretive themes for Chimney Rock State Park are outlined on the following page.



Views of Rumbling Bald Mountain from Eagle Rock, June 2009



LIVING ON THE EDGE

The Rocky Broad River cuts through the mountainous terrain to create the eight-mile long gorge, ending in the man-made Lake Lure. This has created distinct geological features and diverse natural community types including Low Elevation Rocky Summit and Low Elevation Granitic Dome. These areas are often too steep or rocky to support a closed forest canopy and many rare plant and animal species have adapted to such harsh environmental conditions. The area's highest peaks and steep slopes host bird species relatively uncommon to the region. Peregrine falcons and ravens prefer these rocky exposed cliffs to lay their eggs. Rocky outcrops facing north also support unique plant species. Life on these outcrops and cliff faces has teetered on the edge for many of these rare species, but with the continued protection of these incredible places, these species can survive.

GEOLOGIC FORCES BEHIND THE STUNNING SCENERY OF HICKORY NUT GORGE

The magnificent cliffs at Chimney Rock State Park tell the story of nearly 500 million years of geologic forces. These unhurried forces include ancient volcanic activity, heat and pressure miles beneath the earth's surface, plate tectonics and erosion. The area is still seismically active with a magnitude 3.1 earthquake occurring eight miles south of Lake Lure in 2007, and historical earthquake reports in the late 1800s giving Rumbling Bald its name.



Rocky exposed cliffs with the Rocky Broad River below.

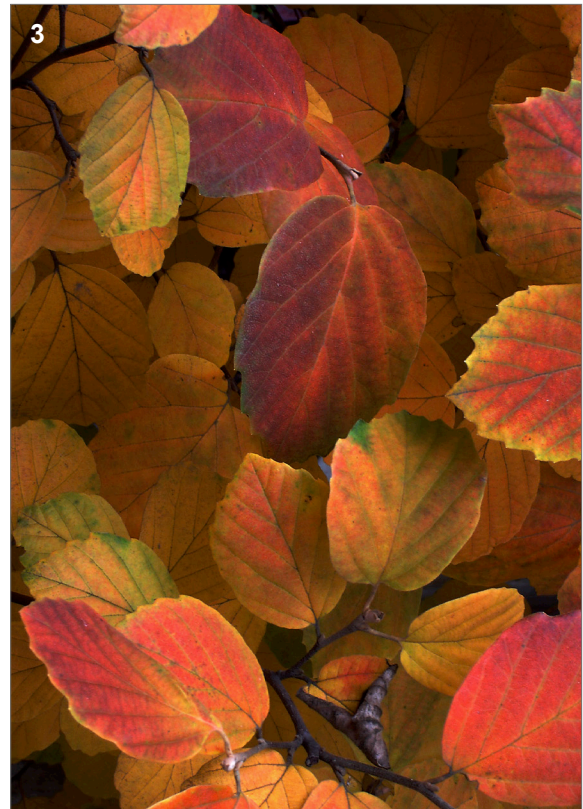


On either side of the river, steep exposed cliffs underscore vegetated ridge tops, demonstrating two distinctly different types of bedrock. The combination of forces of expanding ice between cracks in the cliffs and gravity cause large pieces of cliff to break off. These ongoing rockslides, natural erosive forces and other geological activity have resulted in remarkable landforms including Chimney Rock and the dramatic cliff faces that frame the gorge.

1 Peregrine Falcons; photo by Mike Baird flickr.bairdphotos.com

2 White Rattlesnake Root

3 Large Witch Alder





PARTNERSHIPS FOR PRESERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The dramatic beauty of Hickory Nut Gorge has attracted visitors to the area since the late 1800s. In 1916, the opening of the privately-owned Chimney Rock Park made the area an even more popular travel destination. Development in the gorge and on lands surrounding Lake Lure reflects the area's popularity. Still, perhaps the greatest significance of Chimney Rock State Park remains its outstanding biological diversity, including numerous species of rare plants and animals. Conservation organizations, private landowners and government agencies worked collaboratively to preserve the lands that collectively became a state park in 2005. Surrounding communities and conservation organizations continue to work collaboratively to find a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the need to protect the unique resources of Hickory Nut Gorge.



Visitors atop Chimney Rock, June 2009

CULTURAL CONTEXT

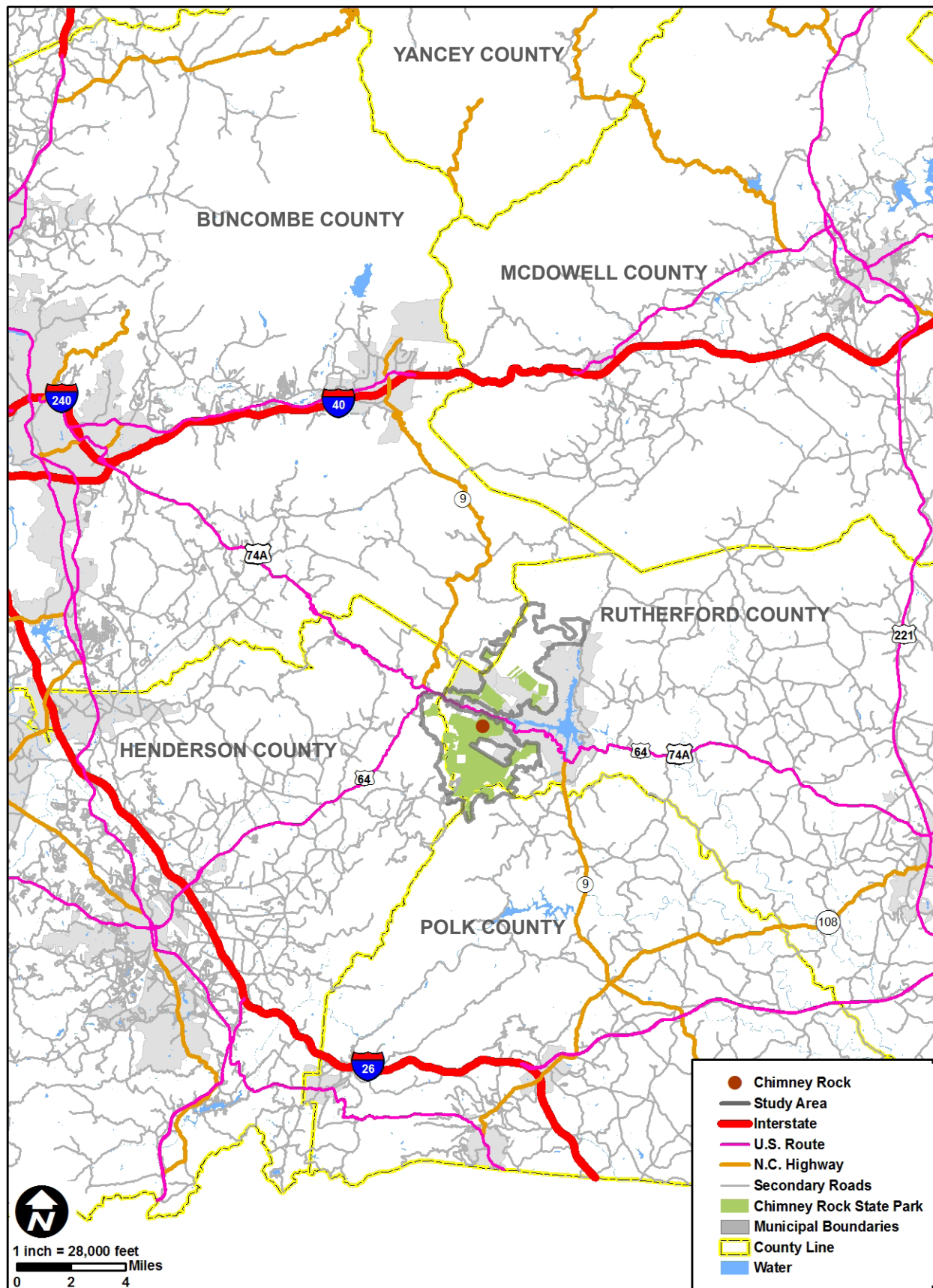
CIRCULATION/ACCESSING THE PARK

Access to Chimney Rock State Park's main entrance is located off U.S. Route 64/74A, 40 miles south of Interstate 40 from U.S. Route 221, and 17 miles east of Interstate 240 from Asheville as shown on Figure 1.5. Secondary roads lead north on N.C. Highway 9 from Montreat and N.C. Highway 64 from Hendersonville to the park entrance off U.S. Route 64/74A.

Vehicular access is limited in parts of the park study area. Sugarloaf Mountain Road and World's Edge Road terminate in southern parts of the study area but do not penetrate northern portions of park-owned property. Much of the surrounding study area is currently inaccessible by vehicle.

In the northern areas of the park near Rumbling Bald, visitors take Boys Camp Road to the climbing day use area. Boys Camp Road is not a through-road and terminates about one half-mile past the climbing day use area, limiting further access. There are two other roadways in the northern study area on the outskirts of the park: Shumont Road and Buffalo Creek Road. Shumont Road is a winding mountain road accessible from N.C. Highway 9. This roadway also ends and splits into two dirt roads, where several privately-owned properties continue before entering the park boundary. Where the paved roadway ends, no public access is currently permitted. Buffalo Creek Road is only accessible by driving around Lake Lure. Following U.S. Route 64/74A east, Buffalo Shoals Road becomes Buffalo Creek Road. Smaller private roadways exist off Buffalo Creek Road leading into residential areas and neighborhoods.

FIGURE 1.5: STUDY AREA CIRCULATION





REGIONAL PLANNING AND LAND USE

The study area for Chimney Rock State Park lies within four counties: Rutherford, Henderson, Polk, and Buncombe (see Figure 1.3, page 1-3 for the study area). Each of these counties have separate comprehensive plans, zoning classifications and land use categories.

RUTHERFORD COUNTY

In Rutherford County, two populated areas within the study area are the Chimney Rock Village and the Town of Lake Lure. Both of these areas are classified by the county as developed or limited transition. Limited transition is defined as providing for limited development, primarily residential. The remaining lands are classified as either rural or are unclassified. The study area in Rutherford County was not zoned at the time this document was prepared.

Several comprehensive land use plans have been developed in the counties that comprise the study area. Based on the *Rutherford County Land Use Plan*, it is envisioned that Rutherford County will focus more on recreation by assisting local municipalities to complement existing park facilities and to meet future needs.

The *Rutherford County Comprehensive Arts, Parks and Recreation Plan* is based upon a review of the entire county, an analysis of existing arts, parks and recreation facilities, citizens surveys, identification of needs and limitations, visions for all aspects of arts, parks and recreation, and recommendations to fulfill these visions. This plan is designed to be implemented over a number of years, and should be serviceable through the year 2015.

The *Lake Lure Comprehensive Plan* refers to Lake Lure as the “focal point of the community, (the town center).” The plan makes references to the existing buildings, and to the feasibility of infill development that would include a mixture of complementary uses, particularly recreation-oriented retail. Other opportunities for reuse are suggested, such as the hotel and arcade building by providing a context for the creation of a compact, vibrant center of activity.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Study areas within Buncombe County did not have associated land use classifications at the time this document was prepared. The study area in Buncombe County has a zoning classification of “open use.”

POLK COUNTY

Polk County study areas did not have associated land use classifications at the time this document was prepared. The study area within the county is not zoned. In 2009, Polk County passed the *Mountainside and Ridgeline Protection Ordinance* for unzoned areas at elevations of 1,650 feet or greater. This ordinance controls development in the western portion of the county by protecting the natural conditions and respecting existing topography, and securing the public health, safety, and general welfare within these areas.

HENDERSON COUNTY

Henderson County has a comprehensive land use classification system. Lands within the study area are broadly classified as residential, vacant, agricultural, and commercial with each of these categories broken out further. For zoning purposes, the majority of the study area in Henderson County is zoned as R3 (intended for low density residential) and Open Use (a district in which almost all uses are allowed, but some are regulated so as to ensure that neighborhood impact is mitigated).

